

This letter was found in
Aunt Teenie McPhie's papers

JW Aird

South Pasadena, Calif.
October 18, 1945

To My Many Dear Friends Who Have Recently Written Me:

Mrs. Aird and I have just returned from San Francisco where we spent a very pleasureable month visiting our son - Dr. Rober B. Aird - and family. He teaches in the Medical School of the University of California, practices neuro-surgery in the University of California Hospital, does research work and has a small private practice, most of which is consultations with other physicians. Believe me, he is a very busy boy. Our son Will and wife are just as busy. They own and operate a physician's laboratory in Inglewood and are doing well. Flora Bell's husband - Winchester Stacy - is in the building business and Flora Bell does all the work in the home. John's wife is extremely busy and is doing well. She teaches violin and piano to some 43 pupils, besides doing her housework.

While up north I was greatly and very agreeably surprised on receiving a large number of letters and birthday cards which had been forwarded from South Pasadena. Most of them came from Utah. All of them contained news which I was pleased to hear. Thanks for your congratulations and wishing me well. The greater part of that flood of mail came from friends in Heber and Wasatch County. The most of the balance came from Provo and Utah County. All of them made me very happy. They served to awaken many fond memories of days gone by.

On arriving home and reading the back numbers of the Wasatch Wave (the paper I named some 56 years ago) the mystery of how so many Wasatch people knew the date of my birth was solved; but up to the present moment I am unable to guess how the rest of you learned the date of my birth, unless you consulted one of the biographical reference publications containing my biography.

To write a personal letter of the kind I would like each of you to receive, and which you so richly deserve, would take me a long, long time. Therefore, I ask you to please pardon my laziness and also the mimeographed copy of this letter.

To further indulge my laziness, I am taking the liberty of incorporating in this letter one I had just finished writing to David N. and Maggie Murdock at the time your letters began to arrive. It contains much that I would like to say to each of you. Even part of the personal things in it applies equally as well to each of you, seeing that all of you have written in the same spirit that Maggie did. I feel sure my Murdock friends will not mind my doing this. I fancy I can hear Dave say, "Hell, no!"

"To David N. and Maggie Murdock
Heber, Utah.

My dear Friends:

I have been trying for a long time to disregard the urge to write you, but it seems I just can't let a letter like you have written me go by without grateful acknowledgement. I presume I am much the same as people say women folks are; that is, I must have the last word.

Just how you, Maggie, could write such a splendid letter is hard for me to understand, especially as you were one of the younger group. Your letter is filled with things about the home folks I had longed to hear. I am sure your father must have had a hand in it.

I presume I should close at this point, as I have said all that impelled me to write. However, now that I have started I may as well jot down a few of the many things that have been coursing through my mind since receiving your letter. I am doing so in the hope that it will, in some measure, repay you for writing me that lengthy, kind and friendly letter.

I feel it is true, as you say, that I have a good reputation and many splendid friends in Heber and Wasatch County.

During the eight years and over that I practiced medicine and surgery in Heber and Wasatch counties and the forty-two years and over in Provo and Utah counties, I have attained a reputation both professional and otherwise, of which I am very proud. I have made many, many more friends in Provo and Utah counties than there are people in Heber and Wasatch counties, but none of them are any better or truer friends.

The reputation that I have is not confined to Wasatch and Utah counties. It has, in some way or other, reached the State, the Nation and International fields, as may be seen by consulting such biographical reference publications as:

"The History of Utah Since Statehood"
 "Who's Who in American Medicine"
 "Who's Who Among Physicians and Surgeons"
 "Who's Important in Medicine"
 "The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography" and
 "The Biographical Encyclopaedia of the World"

I fully realize that my reputation is better and far more widely spread than I deserve. However, my reputation and the honors that have been "thrust" upon me have come without my seeking them. In fact, I was greatly surprised when letters began to come in from the various publishers of the biographical reference works listed above, asking me to submit a short sketch of my life and my photograph for publication.

Such reputation and honors as I have attained, no matter how little or how much deserved, have come, in no small degree, from my early contacts and associations with the folks in my old home town and from my early practice in Heber and surrounding country.

Wasatch people will always be remembered by me with the most kindly feelings. Their honest, conscientious living and their true friendship for me has inspired me to emulate their example; and has strengthened me, as well as encouraged me, to press forward in a life of real service.

As you well know, I began the practice of medicine and surgery in Heber and Wasatch counties. The people there were the ones I was born among, raised with, played with and worked with. We played ball, marbles, steal-sticks, pomp-pomp-poliway, hide-and-go-seek and all the simple games known to pioneers. They were the people I danced with, sang with, swam with and swung with. We hauled wood, coal, hay and grain together with our ox teams and later with horses. We thrashed our grain with flails, tilled and watered our small farms, raised our flocks of sheep and herds of cattle together. Father, in early days, wove the cloth that partially clad many, if not all, of our fellow townsmen; while we children hand-carded the wool into rolls and spun it into yarn and then on to bobbins with which Father wove the cloth on his hand-made loom.

Those were the people who knew me and I knew them. They had faith in me and I in them. After I graduated and began practicing medicine they knew I was telling them the truth as I saw it.

As you well know, there were no other physicians in the county. I was thrown on my own, as it were. The fact that I had to do some major surgery without the assistance of other physicians, and usually had to depend upon my own judgment in the treatment of my patients, compelled me to rely on myself.

The nearest physicians were in Park City and Provo. In those days there were no automobiles nor roads they could run on. There were no trains running into Heber. To get the acutely ill patients to a hospital seemed out of the question. That was especially true in the winter time when the deep snow would drift and block travel for days at a time. At such times it was impossible to even get physician to come to Heber to help with operations or to consult with in serious illnesses.

It was on such an occasion in my early practice that one of Frank Bether's boys became very ill with acute appendicitis. I could obtain no professional assistance yet felt that I was forced to operate as I feared his appendix would rupture if I delayed, thus placing

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his case in the same critical condition that some of my previous cases had gotten into due, in some cases, to time spent in getting consent to operate. You can imagine I was very anxious to have this case one that we physicians term "a clean case". It is true I had the help of a splendid practical nurse, Mrs. Mary Duke, and my good friend and neighbor, Stephen Bond, whom I had trained to give short anesthetics in emergency cases, such as while setting broken bones, etc. Besides such splendid help, I drafted a neighbor to hold the coal-oil lamp, as by the time we were ready to operate night had overtaken us.

Well, to make a long story short, it is needless to say that all concerned were delighted when the fifteen year old boy promptly recovered. It was such cases as his and Mr. Kershaw's emergency tracheotomy operation in which I used an ear speculum for a tracheotomy tube, fastened in with adhesive tape with a hole cut in it, until I could send for one; and your relative's, Lettie Murdock's, gall bladder operation, early in my practice, that boosted my stock as a surgeon.

There were many interesting things talked of in connection with these and other cases, some of which talk you will no doubt remember, but which would take too long to relate here. However, you can readily see how such things ran through my mind on reading your letter.

I am under the impression that I was the first physician in Utah to use diphtheria antitoxin in the treatment of diphtheria and among the first in any of the states to use it outside of the experimental and hospitalized cases.

It was early in the spring of 1894 that I was called to the home of Elisha Averett, where six of his children were ill with diphtheria.

Mrs. Green, who pretended to be a physician, but was not, had been treating them for several days. Her diagnosis was quinsy. I asked Mr. Averett to discharge Mrs. Green, if he wished me to treat his family, as I had made up my mind to handle Mrs. Green differently than Dr. D. Moore Lindsay, my predecessor, had done. Dr. Lindsay and Mrs. Green were almost at sword's point, openly and vehemently, fighting each other verbally. Mrs. Green had come to Heber, from no one knew where, some little time after Dr. Lindsay had located there, and was making Dr. Lindsay's life very miserable. There was no law in the state at that time in regard to the practice of medicine. It was not long after I began to practice that Mrs. Green decided to leave Heber and went away to parts unknown. The Averett cases together with Bishop Clegg's case and a few others that had been glaringly incorrectly diagnosed and incorrectly treated seemed too much for her to face.

Pardon my digression. I must get back to my subject. Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes, I remember.

The rational of the new diphtheria treatment appealed to my reason. I told the Averett family that if any of my relatives had diphtheria I certainly would advise trying the new treatment. The Averetts consented and I telephoned to one of the drug stores in Salt Lake City. They told me they did not have any antitoxin, but if there were any in the city they would send it to me. Later they telephoned that there was none. There were no telephones in Heber at that time, except a central one in Mrs. Charles Alexander's millinery shop.

On hearing from Salt Lake City, I telephoned to the telegraph station in Park City to have them telegraph Denver for enough antitoxin for four patients. I feared that one of the six would die before the medicine could reach me. That proved to be the case, and knowing that the boy who first took sick had practically recovered, except that he was partially paralyzed, I thought that four would be all that would need treatment. All the antitoxin that Denver could send me was enough to treat two patients. That placed me on the spot, as it were. I was in a quandary whether to treat two or four patients with the new medicine. I finally decided to divide it among the four. All of them recovered very promptly, which greatly surprised the day and night experienced practical nurses. They said they had never seen any diphtheria cases recover so rapidly before. By this time, other exposed families had been taken sick with diphtheria and I kept the wires

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hot to both Denver and Omaha asking for antitoxin until the epidemic had subsided. I treated 93 cases in all. Three of the number died, due, I thought, to late treatment. Treatment of diphtheria with antitoxin at that time marked a great advance in medicine.

A short time after that I was asked by our State Medical Society to present a paper on the treatment of diphtheria with antitoxin. However, it was not until about two years later when the use of antitoxin became general in the treatment of diphtheria.

It was in my early practice, in 1896, that I attended a meeting of the American Medical Association. Before leaving for the East I secured a Salt Lake physician, who was not yet well established in practice, to take my place during my absence. When I returned home some of my clientele were almost ready to string both of us up. It would be of great interest to recite the reasons, but that would occupy too much space.

At the Medical Convention one of the doctors read a paper, citing 120 consecutive major operations without a single death. Few physicians there, if any, believed him, as in those days most physicians were forced to handle many cases late in their illnesses and, at least the conscientious physicians, were willing to operate if they felt there was still a chance for the patient's recovery.

Among those who discussed the doctor's paper were nationally and internationally known surgeons, such as Dr. W. W. Keen of Philadelphia and Dr. J. B. Murphy of Chicago, who did not spare the doctor in their criticisms and who plainly showed they doubted the accuracy of his statistics. Dr. Murphy in his talk had said something with which I did not agree. Being a newcomer, I thoughtlessly arose, gave my name and the state I was from, as was the custom, and said my little say, in which I disagreed with part of what Dr. Murphy had said. While on my feet I related some few surgical cases I had had, some of whom had died due to late operations. When I sat down, Dr. Keen jumped up and said, "Dr. Aird of Utah is an honest man. I would rather place my life in his hands than in those who claim such a high percentage of recoveries". That evening the physicians had a reception at which Dr. Murphy motioned for me to join the group he was in. He said, "I want to shake hands with you even if you did not agree with me. Did you hear the compliment that Dr. Keen gave you?" Without stopping for a reply he went on, "If I were you I would get him to write it down and then I would frame it and hang it in my office".

That story was told among the physicians of Utah by some of the Salt Lake doctors who had attended the Convention.

It is considered a real honor to belong to the American College of Surgeons, not alone for being a competent surgeon, but for standing for the good things in our profession. The college was organized for cleaning house, as it were, doing away with needless operations, splitting of fees and other evils that had crept in among surgeons. The year following the organization of the college I was asked to become a member and was admitted without examination. I helped to organize and was a Charter Member of the Utah Medical Society and was elected as its President to serve in 1901.

I am enclosing a copy of a clipping from a Provo paper, together with other copies, which may interest you. We had a Golden Wedding Anniversary on June 21st and on Sunday, June 24th Flora Bell, our daughter living in Long Beach, gave a reception in our honor. We enjoyed it immensely and some of our friends, who had moved from Utah to California, 68 of whom attended, seemed to enjoy themselves almost as much as we did. They all stayed until the closing hour, chatting with us and with each other. Many of them had not seen each other for a long, long time. It was a real get-together party. We sure enjoyed it.

Yes, Dave, with your good health and wonderful vitality you, no doubt, can keep pace with me in reaching the 103 milestone of life. You now have only about 13½ years to go, while I have a little longer time. My wish for you is that you can make it; that is, providing you keep well and are enjoying life until that time.

I used to joke with one of our undertakers and tell him I was going to live until I was 103 and then I would dig my own grave and

lie down in it, passing off there, letting the sexton cover me up; thus saving the mortuary fee. Scotch, you will say. But, putting all joking aside, I can see that you and I are to have some joy in life for some time to come.

I am sure pleased and proud to get the greetings from the Murdock family who are still alive. I presume it was from the Murdock girls that you got the impression that I had some dancing ability and that the girls liked me for a dancing partner. Give them all my love and best wishes for their future health and happiness and, if you don't mind, let them read this letter. I have let some of my family and friends read your letter.

I attended your brother and uncle, John H. Murdock of Orem, in his last illness only a few short years ago. He was the oldest of the Murdock family, as I understand it. He was a fine, big-hearted man.

What you say about Mrs. Aird, my good wife and helpmate, is true. Yes, indeed, she has good taste; and her kindly, friendly ways has endeared her to many good friends. She often says, with much pride, that she has many splendid friends in Utah. In fact, I think she thinks she has more friends than I have, but she has never said so. If she really thinks that, I would have to differ with her. It is true she was one of the leaders in and very active in various women's clubs of Utah. Her two terms, in recent years, in the State Legislature, where she served the State well, gave her other contacts and good experiences; but such contacts were limited in scope in comparison to my own. She was also a member of the Board of Regents of the State University for a number of years. She has contributed in no small degree to the success I have attained. She thinks your letter is a gem and wishes to be remembered to both of you and to all of the Murdock family.

No, I never was one who cared to pile up wealth. I have frequently said that if I could make the bread and butter come out even in the end, that was all I cared for. I hope I have succeeded in doing that. I think I have unless inflation uses it up too rapidly or unless Mrs. Aird and I live too long!

I am wondering if your letter has inflated my ego, seeing that I have written at such length and have talked so much of self. However, in saying what I have, there were two thoughts uppermost in my mind. They were simply to give you some faint idea of the many things your letter awakened in my memory, and to let you, my life-long friends, know a small part of my life's history that you likely would not otherwise have learned.

With kindest regards to you and all the Murdock family, I am,

Very sincerely,

Dr. J. W. Aird"

No doubt the letter to my Murdock friends will be more interesting to my Wasatch County friends than to the rest of you. However, I feel sure it will be of interest to all.

I wish I knew and could remember each and all of your birthdays, but that would be beyond my capacity; therefore, please think of me, and of my wish for you when your birthday arrives. My wish is that each of you will have a most happy birthday. May you enjoy it and each succeeding one, as much as, or even more, if that be possible, than I did mine.

The people I have served and with whom I have associated, no matter from what locality, have contributed to my happiness. They have made my life worthwhile. Much of the best of my life, in fact over half, was spent in Provo among good and true friends. They had much to do with making me what I am. Especially is that true in respect to those splendid physicians and nurses with whom I came in almost daily contact while working in the Provo General Hospital and Aird Hospital for many years. The physicians of Utah County, and in fact of the State, have all played a part in making me what you know me to

be. The nurses I helped to train and those who so loyally and splendidly assisted me in operating and carrying on the Aird Hospital for many years, hold a special corner in my memory and affections. All have contributed to my wellbeing and happiness.

This letter has taken on, to quite an extent, and I presume naturally so, the theme of your building character and reputation. That, no doubt, was largely due to Maggie Murdock's, and some of the rest of you, speaking of my having a good reputation and many good friends. That being the case, I feel I should, in this connection, pay tribute to and give much credit to a few noble souls who have greatly influenced me, but who have since passed on.

Dr. John R. Park, who in the early history of Utah, was the President of the University of Deserett, now the University of Utah, was one who influenced me greatly. When I say that, I am sure my classmates and many of his numerous students over a period of many years, will know just what I mean. Dr. Park was in truth a teacher.

However, above all others, were my beloved parents. They had a most profound influence on me. They built the foundation and framework that supports the structure that my character and reputation rests on. They earnestly and constantly tried to instill in my mind a deep regard for kindness, fairness, truthfulness, honesty and integrity of character. How well they succeeded is for you and the public to say. The rest of you, together with my good brother and sisters and my own family and their families, and my teachers, have taught me efficiency, patience, tolerance and perseverance. All of you have furnished me with splendid examples and have endeavored to keep me on the right tract. You have inspired me to make of myself what I am. It is for you and the public to say how well you have succeeded.

Mrs. Aird joins me in best wishes to you all.

Most sincerely,

Dr. J. W. Aird.

MANY FORMER PROVOANS AT AIRD PARTY

Details of the lovely reception given Sunday last in Long Beach, California, to honor Dr. and Mrs. J. W. Aird, former Provoans, on the occasion of their golden wedding anniversary, will be read with keen interest by their many friends here.

Highlighting the happy events of the day for the Airds were the 86 cards and letters received from their friends throughout Utah county.

The reception, which was given by Mrs. Flora Bell Stacy, daughter of the beloved couple, was held at her home, in the form of an afternoon tea. Invitations were issued to old friends only and 68 called during the afternoon hours.

Their son, Dr. Robert Aird and family were present from San Francisco, and friends attended from various parts of Southern California, from San Diego, up the coast.

Assisting Mrs. Stacy were Mrs. Will Aird, Mrs. Beth Aird and Mrs. Robert Aird, daughters-in-law of the honored couple, who now live in South Pasadena.

GOLDEN WEDDING

In June of Eighteen Ninety Five
In San Francisco did arrive
A couple young with one intent,
One John and Emily marriage bent.

Their love imbued the passing years
With fortitude which banished fears;
With charm and grace they lived each day
To help whoever came their way.

The surgeon, John, did cut and sew
To mend his patient's high and low;
With skill he practiced day and night
For fifty years he waged the fight.

And Emily raised a brood of four,
But not content she did far more -
A mighty force in education
She fought for better legislation.

So hail the couple staunch and true
Whose loyalty inspires us all anew,
And sing their praise, Let us be gay
On this their Golden Wedding Day.

Robert B. Aird
June 24, 1945

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In the time of Lincoln and General Lee
Our Dad was born in '63.
He's lived quite a stretch as you can see,
Through half the years of our country.

Yet lithe and nimble and gay as a lark,
Dad can dance a jig from dawn to dark.
From pioneer stock, now children hark,
He's as staunch as the wood in Noah's ark.

He's practiced medicine for fifty years,
In modern surgery - one of the pioneers.
His skill is acclaimed to countless ears,
By the praise of his patients' and friends' loud cheers.

Loyal, dependable, faithful and smart,
He's a finer man than words can impart.
His unselfish devotion to the healing art,
Is a splendid example to all from the start.

And so dear children it's needless to say
We've a Dad to be proud of in every way.
So let us stand and shout Hooray!
Here is to Dad on his eightieth birthday.

Dr. Robert B. Aird
Sept. 26, 1943